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PRAYER AS A SCIENCE

BY

W. WYBERGH

THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE
ADYAR, MADRAS, INDIA
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PRAYER AS A SCIENCE

There are many people who, in passing out beyond the trammels of merely conventional religion in which they have been brought up, run the risk of throwing away the reality, when all they really require is to change the form of their convictions, their practice and their religious life. Prayer is one of those things which is most likely to be discarded by such people as useless, even if it is not rejected as a superstitious, impertinent, and unworthy attempt to interfere with the laws of the Universe—in either case to their great loss. The writer knows from personal experience how natural and even honourable the mistake may be, and he knows also how terrible is the blank that is left, and what sufferings the transition from tradition to reality entails. This little book is an attempt to help other people over the gulf which has cost him so much to cross.

He has found the conception of Prayer as a Science to be not only not antagonistic to practical Religion, but the means whereby it is possible for the soul in search of Truth to avail itself of the help and inspiration which Religion affords, and to appreciate those wonderful records of the masters of prayer which otherwise would have appeared as vain or morbid emotional rhapsodies.

Introduction

Among the questions with which all thoughtful people are deeply concerned to-day are those relating to the meaning and rationale of prayer. These questions concern not the religious man alone but the practical man and the student of human nature and psychology as well. For, in spite of modern scepticism and doubt, and in spite also of the growing recognition of the universality of Natural Law, it is a remarkable fact that prayer, an apparently irrational practice, remains one of the greatest instinctive and conscious needs of human nature.

Nothing is easier than to cast ridicule upon it, and a hundred more or less superficial "proofs" and arguments may be brought forward to show that it must be a mere delusion, unworthy of the attention of a rational man, except as a curiosity of superstition and folk-lore. The modern man of prayer finds himself confronted with questions such as these: "What happens if two people are praying for success against each other? *Both* prayers cannot be answered!" "If God is good and all-powerful, why are some prayers answered, and some, just as good and worthy ones, apparently disregarded? Success does not seem to depend upon the obvious need, nor can the greatest earnestness or the highest saintliness always ensure it," "We are told to ask and we shall receive, but if we ask that the laws of nature shall be

suspended for us by the kindness of nature's God, will our prayer be granted?" Most of such "rationalistic" (and most reasonable) questions are only difficult to answer upon the supposition that the answer to prayer, whether for physical or moral or spiritual benefits, is something "supernatural"—a gift of God's caprice, superseding the laws of nature. They all lose their sting if prayer is regarded simply and naturally as an effort put forth like other human efforts, the result of which is certain, whether "successful" or not, and depends partly upon the strength and skill with which the effort is made and partly upon the amount of resistance or inertia which has to be overcome in each case. Regarded in this light it becomes a science, subject to natural (though not exclusively to physical) law, and can be rationally studied, not as a curiosity, but with a view to increasing its efficiency and applying it in the best directions.

To do this in no way necessitates the divorce of prayer from Religion, for if prayer is a force acting in accordance with natural law, that very thing which is called law by the student is what is meant by the religious man when he speaks of "the will of God". Nor are the conclusions and results of scientific study necessarily incompatible with even the *method* of presentation which has become traditional with religious people, for it would be at any rate theoretically possible to agree upon the use of

religious terms in a fixed scientific sense. It is, however, more than questionable whether any advantage whatever would be gained by so doing, for after all, while it is the function of science to instruct and define, it is the office of Religion to inspire, and there would be a loss, not a gain, in converting the beautiful images and inspiring symbols of Religion into a technical scientific terminology.

In any case the fact remains that to many, the language of theology is clumsy and obscure, and even repellent, and long usage for other purposes has made the employment of its terms almost impossible for scientific or intellectual purposes. Moreover the scientific man who approaches the subject with an entirely open mind often has an uneasy feeling that a man speaking from the theological or conventional religious standpoint is always liable, however unconsciously, to attempt to square the facts with his traditional methods of presentation, and not vice versa. Whether this is so or not, it is undoubtedly true that if we go, as we should, to the original sources and records left by such masters of prayer as St. Teresa and many another great mystic, we find them indeed unrivalled as an inspiration and often most shrewd in their practical directions, but we find also that their explanations are naïve, unscientific, often desperately crude, and entirely unconvincing. They are apt to lose themselves in terms such as "Grace," "Our Lord's Passion," "the mysterious

work of God in the soul," or the "Scheme of Redemption"; such terms undoubtedly express actual realities, but, as currently employed, whether in the writings of the saints or in modern pulpits, represent conceptions entirely divorced from natural law, and amount to a continual invocation of the miraculous.

On the other hand the "rationalist" is apt to put aside as "subjective" all experiences which seem to indicate the reality of the forces set in motion by prayer (as if the "subjective" side of man's life were not just as real and important as the "objective," and just as much a matter for study !), to disregard as "morbid" those which seem to imply the existence of a real unseen world, and to deny the possibility or validity of any form of consciousness superior to the intellectual consciousness.

A candid student will deny the reality of nothing for which there is good evidence, but when asked to believe in the "miraculous" will simply recognise that he is face to face with something the laws of which he does not yet understand. By study on these lines, unprejudiced by materialistic conceptions, and equally indifferent to the needs of any theological scheme or the demands of any creed, one is enabled to some extent at any rate to understand the meaning of prayer; to see that if prayers are sometimes silly and irrational, they need not be so; that the answer to prayer is not a matter of chance or caprice, although it may be quite other than was desired or

expected; that the forces of the unseen world which prayer puts in motion are just as real and just as subject to law as the physical forces with which ordinary science deals; that in fact there is a Science of Prayer, and that this science is intimately bound up with the science of life itself.

In a little book of this description the reader will not expect a discussion of the reasons or the evidence upon which our explanations are based. It is necessary to assume certain general conceptions as a basis of discussion. Such assumptions as are put forward here are not advanced as religious dogmas, but merely as the result of the study and experience of many people, too long to detail, but always subject to revision in the light of more knowledge and experience. The present aim is to try to apply these general conceptions to the practical study of prayer, and to the explanation of its experiences and phenomena, and even this attempt will not amount to more than a mere outline of the nature and scope of prayer at different stages of human development, illustrated more particularly by reference to prayer as practised by Christians.

For there are so many varieties and degrees of it, from crude appeals to the unseen powers for the gratification of ambition or appetite, to the rapture of the saint who cries: "God, of thy goodness give me Thyself, for only in Thee have I all," that at first sight it is difficult to find much in common between

them or to arrive at any satisfactory definition of prayer. Some prayers are not even moral, some of the highest do not contain any petition at all, and yet all are recognised as expressions of a common human instinct. A closer study, however, shows that prayer, like everything else in the universe, is subject to the law of evolution. We shall find that each type is more especially suited to a particular stage of development, and depends for its prospect of success upon its reasonable correspondence, not only with the actual conditions, physical, emotional, or mental, of the outer world, but with the habitual interests and attitude of mind of the petitioner, while prayers which are useful at one stage may be positively harmful at another, and some kinds of prayer cannot be employed at all by any except highly developed people.

The Nature of Man and the Nature of Prayer

The conviction that prayer is real and that it is subject to universal natural law is the first essential to an understanding of it. But in order to study this law we must first form some more or less definite idea of human nature itself. What then is the conception of human nature which best accounts for *all* the facts, and how far does such a conception enable us to attempt a rational account of the various activities which go under the name of prayer?

The purely materialistic conception of man is recognised as untenable nowadays. The objective reality of the unseen world and of that part of man which functions therein is impressing itself more and more every day upon all observers. On the other hand the theory that man is essentially his intellect, that the mental mode of consciousness is the only possible one, and that "what I don't know isn't knowledge," is being superseded by the recognition of Spirit or Life as the great reality of all, and "body," "mind" and "soul" as its instruments and expression.

The whole universe, man included, is a manifestation of this Life, which in its universal, unconditioned state we call God. Such a conception does not involve that crude pantheism which regards God as *only* the life of Universe, and as limited by the Universe, but it does involve the essential divinity of all things therein. We conceive man therefore as partaking of this Divine nature, essentially Divine, essentially free, but conditioned in time and space. Of this essential divinity of man the great Christian mystics have spoken in similar terms to those used by the great non-Christian philosophies. Thus St. Teresa has likened man to a castle of diamonds, in the centre of which is God Himself; Julian of Norwich expresses the same idea: "In man's soul is God's very dwelling"; St. Paul speaks of man's body as the "temple of God". Similarly

we read in the Upaniṣhaṭs : " Within man's highest radiant vesture is stainless, partless Brahm : that is the pure Light of Lights," " He is in the midst of the body, made all of light, translucent," and the great Veḍānṭic philosophy is based upon this foundation.

The process of manifestation, the life of a universe, consists as it were in a cyclic procession of the Divine Life outwards towards the pole of matter, inwards towards the pole of spirit. Bergson expresses to some extent the same idea when he says : " Life as a whole, from the initial impulsion that thrusts it into the world, appears as a wave which rises, and which is opposed by the descending movement of matter." Life and Matter are merely opposite phases of the great cycle, and are equally divine. All individualised life exists in and through matter, which may be regarded as appropriated by it as a vehicle and means of manifestation. Human life represents a higher stage of the ascending movement, animal and plant life a lower, and again, within the limits of human evolution, bodily life is the lower stage and mental life the higher. Broadly speaking, Life or Spirit in the human stage functions and expresses itself not in two but in three divisions, namely as body, as soul or mind, and as what we call the (human) spirit, by which we mean that stage in which the human consciousness has attained to greater freedom and universality than in the intellect. The environment

of matter in which man finds himself is also threefold, of different dergees of materiality, corresponding to the human body, soul, and spirit, and man lives and moves therein by virtue of the possession of corresponding vehicles and faculties. These faculties are accordingly at the same time his means of expression and also his limitations on each plane. There are finer and more exact classifications, but for the present purpose this broad outline is sufficient.

In the course of evolution "body" is the first of the vehicles to develop, soul and spirit being as yet latent, and in consequence the bodily activities are the first to be manifested; later on the spirit creates a mind for its own use and manifestation, and centres its activities therein, while at a still later stage, when it has created a suitable "body" or faculty for the purpose, the spirit becomes self-conscious on its own plane. It is important, however, to understand that it does not follow that what comes first in time is necessarily the foundation and origin of what appears later, for indeed the reverse would be nearer to a true statement of the case.

Each step represents an expansion of consciousness, and that expansion is the aim and the actual process of evolution itself. The relationship with God, the All-conscious and All-pervading, exists always, but the *Consciousness* of that relationship depends upon the extent to which the human spirit has conquered

its limitations and made its vehicles into a true expression of itself so far as the intrinsic limitations of each plane permit. This conquest pursues an orderly course, while varying infinitely in details for each individual. During the age-long struggle the spirit learns to know itself as man, but when the victory is won it knows itself as divine, and shares the Divine Consciousness. This is the goal of all evolution and the ultimate object of all prayer. In religious language it is known as "Salvation" or "The Kingdom of Heaven" or "Union with God".

In order to understand prayer it is helpful to consider it in relation to each stage of this conquest, until the goal is attained. The subject will then divide itself according as prayer is chiefly concerned with the things of the body, the soul, or the spirit itself. This division is not in practice always a hard and fast one. These are necessarily stages of transition, for it is not a case of discarding the body and later the soul, in order to experience the spiritual life, but of superadding the latter—not, as St. Paul says, of being unclothed but of being clothed upon. The varieties of prayer are accordingly infinite, but the usefulness of our study depends first upon the due correlation of any prayer with the stage of evolution that has been reached, and secondly upon the rational use of a particular variety of prayer for the purpose of facilitating the attainment of

the particular stage of evolution that lies immediately in front.

The conventional idea of man as having one life only on earth, into which he has to cram the whole course of evolution from the savage to the saint, is responsible for much confusion upon this point, for it is perfectly obvious that conscious union with God and the suffusion of all bodily activities with the life of the spirit is an ideal which is altogether out of the reach of the majority of mankind. The sound common sense of the ordinary man tells him that he had better concentrate his efforts upon something practical—for him; but what is sensible and practical for him is stupid and banal for the saint or the philosopher. Hence frequent misunderstandings and much vague empiricism. The conception of man as a spiritual being, clothing himself again and again with different personalities in order to gain powers and experience in the worlds of soul and body, removes these difficulties, and is moreover in harmony with the rhythmic ebb and flow which is seen to dominate the phenomenal universe and with the conception of the great cycle of upward and downward flowing life in which God manifests himself as a Universe, and which is indeed itself the very warp and woof of the Universe. The student of prayer as a science will find the theory of reincarnation as indispensable a key as the atomic theory is to a student of chemistry.

What is Prayer

We have seen that the final object of all prayer is the conscious union of the human with the Divine, but although the object may be thus described, we still lack a definition of the means whereby it is to be attained, and of the nature of prayer itself, and it is clear that the definition must be a wide one. For prayer is deep-rooted and universal; it finds expression both above and below the plane of the intellect, and its goal is a fact, not intellectual, but practical and vital; it represents something fundamental in human nature itself. It goes even deeper than human nature; it pervades all creation; it is the conscious expression in the individual of the world-process itself, the ever-becoming which is essentially the unfolding of consciousness, typified in the language of religion as "the taking of the Manhood into God," until God shall be all in all.

In general terms, therefore, whatever its form may be, prayer may be defined as the attempt to escape from limitations of consciousness.

The particular limitations involved will of course be those with which a man is most concerned at the time, and the science of prayer will have for its object to determine what in each particular case is the proper field for its activity as well as what methods are best suited to that field. The definition which has been given includes, it will be seen, not only the deliberate

act of conscious prayer, but the constant attitude towards life. The intimate connection between the two has rightly been insisted on by all who have investigated the subject, and the failure to recognise it is at the root of the futility that characterises those prayers which are not in harmony with the life that is being lived at the time; the science of prayer includes the knowledge of what this relationship is. The definition itself is dual, for limitations may be escaped from either by contending against them on their own level or by transcending them altogether. The one method may be said to be related to the vehicle and the other to the consciousness itself, but just as consciousness can be distinguished but not separated from the vehicle, so these two kinds of prayer can be theoretically distinguished but not practically used apart from each other. Prayer in fact always includes both methods, probably at every stage, though in the earlier stages the one is more prominent, and in the later stages the other.

Prayer in the Physical World

Of the earliest stages of prayer it is unnecessary to speak here. The prayer of the atom, the prayer of the crystal, of the cell or of the plant is doubtless a reality, but one which is inappreciable by us. Yet it is surely true that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth until now, waiting for the coming of the sons of God".

Something approaching to what we know as prayer can be traced first in the animal kingdom. It begins in appetite, gross physical appetite such as hunger and sex desire, and in the effort to satisfy these. All the appetites are in essence the feeling of limitation and pain, and the attempt to satisfy them is the effort to expand the consciousness, which is at this stage entangled and identified with the physical vehicle. Truly and most beautifully has it been said: "The lions roaring after their prey do seek their meat from God."

But we know that at this stage *effective* prayer is action. The lion does not sit down and pray—it goes out, kills, and eats; and so its prayer is answered, its physical limitations are conquered, and its physical consciousness expands by taking. But even at this early stage there is another kind of prayer involved, which receives another kind of answer. More important than the satisfying of its hunger, which was the immediate object of its prayer, is the *power* that it gains by appetite and action, that is to say the enhancement of faculty, which is the preparation for the time when it will be possible to begin to transcend physical limitations, but meanwhile appears to be only an increased efficiency in capturing its prey.

This illustration of prayer at its lowest stage will serve to show how much of truth there is in the old proverbs "*Laborare est orare*" and "God helps those

who help themselves". It is true at all stages, in a more and more subtle sense, for if to labour is to pray, it is also true that prayer as ordinarily understood is itself, when efficient, work and activity of the highest and most far-reaching order and has tremendous results upon its own plane. But in the more obvious sense of the words it is evident that, broadly speaking, the proper way to overcome physical limitations and disabilities is not to sit down and pray for their removal but to get up and take your coat off and work. In the earlier stages of human evolution the chief centre of activity is still in the physical world; physical limitations are both intrinsically the most important and are also the most acutely felt. So long as this is the case it is better to work than to pray, or rather work is the most effective and appropriate prayer. The difference between the lion's hunger, the savage's lust, and the desire for "wealth, health and happiness" of the worldly, then, is one of degree, not of kind, and as a matter of fact so long as a man is at this stage it is extremely improbable that his power will have developed to such an extent that his efforts to accomplish his objects by "prayer" will be anything but weak, ineffective, and superstitious. But as in the case of the lion, the power of will, emotion and intellect which alone will enable him to pray effectively when the right time comes, can meanwhile only be developed as an apparent, though only apparent, by-product of his physical efforts. For this

is the great and open secret—that the direct and ostensible objects of prayer are at no stage the real ones, but only the necessary means of achieving the real, and the attainment of these ostensible objects actually signifies the end of their usefulness and desirability, and marks the time for passing on to a higher stage and a wider consciousness. Never in the history of the human heart has any success proved other than a disillusionment and a disappointment, for success is a will-o'-the-wisp, and effort is the real beacon light. It is not by a mere whim that Bernard Shaw in his play of *Man and Superman* has pictured Hell as the place where you can have everything you like without making any effort, nor that Faust devotes himself for ever to the Powers of Darkness in the day when, mistaking the means for the end, the shadow for the substance, he shall say to the passing moment: "Stay, for thou art sweet."

Effort is the mere beacon light, the guide, not the goal; an aspect of the ever-becoming, "*das Werdende, das ewig wirkt und lebt,*" not that "Unborn, Perpetual, Eternal, and Ancient" which has no beginning and no end. The effort towards the removal of limitations has its chief value as a preparation for transcending them, though at every stage it has a value in itself greater than that of the objects towards which it is consciously directed.

Meanwhile it is inevitable that when the non-physical powers of will and intellect begin to develop,

they should at first be used for the attainment of physical objects only, and there is a transition stage when the definite act of prayer is made use of in the same way; but gradually, as mental activities become mingled with physical ones, they become themselves objects of desire, and the centre of gravity, so to speak, begins to shift from the physical to the emotional and mental planes. At this stage we begin to escape from physical limitations not only by removing but by transcending them, and to realise at the same time that the physical environment is not the only one, nor even the most important. It is at this stage accordingly that the prayer which is effective physical action, only begins to be mingled with the prayer that is effective action on the subtler planes, but, viewed from the physical plane, *appears* to consist of inactive dependence upon supernatural help.

Prayers for the physical objects, provided that the will and the intellect are sufficiently developed, are undoubtedly effectual, but the proviso is a drastic one. Direct action of mind upon matter, that is to say the transformation of mental into physical energy, undoubtedly takes place; the whole of our material civilisation, the houses and the tools and the railways, are, as Edward Carpenter has pointed out in his *Art of Creation*, nothing but the result of this action. The brain and the nerves of the human body constitute the machinery through which it ordinarily takes

place, but the fact that it *does* take place forbids us to dogmatise as to the impossibility of aggregations of matter other than those known as "organic" being directly affected by mind, *provided the mental force exerted is strong enough.* On the other hand the direct action of mind upon mind, soul upon soul, has now, under the name of "telepathy," become a scientific commonplace, and doubtless the results produced by prayer for physical objects are mostly brought about through the mediacy of other human minds (possibly including the minds of the so-called "dead") acting upon the physical world through their own or other human bodies. Most truly indeed the answer comes from God, just as in the case of the lion, but by no miracle; rather by conformity to some of those manifestations of God's will which scientific men call the laws of psychology. It is conceivable and probable that an enormously developed will and intellect might succeed in bringing about physical effects upon inorganic matter by a direct effort, but it would be a waste of energy, since it could be done more easily in another manner.

Here, as always, it is not a case of crying "Lord, Lord" but of *doing the will, i.e.*, conforming with the laws; and the scientific man who, confident in his own God-given powers and in the laws of nature, deliberately and skilfully makes use of them to gain his object, is "praying" as much as the man who calls upon "the God that he took from a printed

book" to grant his desires. Yet there are good practical reasons in the case of the ordinary man for directing prayers of this kind to an omnipotent God. One of them is that success depends, other things being equal, upon the amount of confidence and the concentration with which the effort is made; and the kind of man who prays for material things more readily believes in his ability to command the assistance of an Omnipotent Being than in his ability to command his own powers. He has not yet attained to faith, even "as a grain of mustard seed". It is in any case a step forward in evolution if, by any means whatever, a man can learn to appreciate the reality of the unseen.

There are, however, dangers and disadvantages attending this kind of prayer, even when it is most effective. It is very remarkable that none of the great teachers and practisers of prayer have troubled themselves at all with the question of how the mental activity called prayer may be most effectively directed towards the attainment of physical objects. From Jesus himself, who refused to "command these stones that they be made bread," and whose teaching was "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you," down to St. Teresa, who says that she laughs and grieves at the things that many people ask the nuns to pray for on their behalf—"For persons even request us to ask for money and revenues"—all have either explicitly, or

by reason of their silence, plainly indicated that the attainment of physical objects is not the true purpose of prayer. The reason is that when in the ordinary course of nature the object of physical limitations is beginning to be attained and the higher faculties developed, the attempt to turn these powers backward and to use them to attain things which were only the means by which they themselves were evolved, is to set one's face against evolution and deliberately to shut oneself up in a backwater. Well did St. Paul advise that, forgetting those things which are behind, we should press towards the mark. To look backwards is indeed to petrify—to become a pillar of salt. It is the first step on the road to that prostitution of the highest powers for the lowest ends which some have called "Black Magic". That road appears at the start so natural, so innocent, so reasonable and sensible; and yet it is so dangerous! Those who really have the faith required to move mountains would be the last to dream of using it for that purpose; they have far more important things to do in the invisible worlds.

It would, however, be a great mistake to assume that all prayer for physical objects is at all times wrong. To do so would be to condemn equally the application of the intellect to the outside world. The distinction between its right and wrong use for such ends is a fine and subtle one, but the suggestion may be hazarded that it depends, not only upon

the stage of evolution that has been attained, but upon the particular phase in each such stage. The beginning of each such stage is marked by the application of the newly attained powers to remove the remaining limitations of the stage below, while towards the end of the same stage these powers are applied in preparation for the attainment of another and higher one. At this phase the lower limitations are more properly ignored and transcended than struggled against, and prayer will be used accordingly.

Prayer will be rightly used by the developed man for physical objects when it amounts to a frank, joyful, and natural effort at self-expression without *arrière pensée* or calculating self-interest. These conditions belong naturally both to the more primitive type of mind and also to that earlier phase of each stage, in which limitations are fought against rather than transcended, and the danger of such prayer consists precisely in its tendency to divert the attention from the endeavour to transcend them, which must be made sooner or later. In practice every one, provided that he understands and recognises the danger, will find himself, without casuistry, in a position to judge whether such prayer is right for himself or not. But when a man finds, as so many do, that he is no longer able to pray whole-heartedly for the simple and obvious physical needs and interests, it is a reason for congratulation and encouragement, not for regret and heart-searchings and effort to put the clock back.

TRANSITION

It has been pointed out that there is a necessary and inevitable stage of transition, and it is this fact that makes it so easy to follow false ideals. The danger can be avoided by a knowledge of the science of prayer and the adoption of methods suitable to this transition, but they who are in this stage themselves are rarely in a position to know what ought to be done or how to do it, and must usually be guided by those who know more. It would be folly in any case to put before men who are in this stage the spiritual ideal of perfect selflessness and the mystical Union of man with God, for they would not understand it and their progress would be retarded thereby. The path of progress for them is the gradual turning of the attention from more material objects of desire to less material ones and the rousing of the intellectual and moral faculties, so that when the time comes for spiritual illumination they may not be dazzled and blinded by it. The sense of reliance upon the power of the unseen world is itself, *at this stage*, a means of developing a man's own powers in that world and leading him to seek satisfaction in the higher worlds themselves instead of using them for what he can get out of them in the way of physical satisfaction.

One of the best ways of making the transition is to employ, in prayer, ideas and language which have both an exact and literal meaning and also a more

general and symbolic one. Thus a bridge is formed between the material and the ideal which is passed over almost unconsciously. It is here that organised public prayer and ritual, and the liturgy and symbolism of the Churches, becomes an instrument of such great value, though their usefulness by no means ends here. The masterpieces of prayer and ritual are those which carry in them the seeds of many meanings at once, each equally real on its own plane: wherein the simple man finds expression of his daily physical needs, the man of intellect sees mirrored those deep verities which his concrete mind fails to grasp, the artist senses the glorious reality of life hidden in familiar form, and the mystic, seeing and knowing and loving all these, gathers them up and enters with them into the Holy of Holies. For the Universe, seen and unseen, is of one piece, seamless, and shot throughout with the golden thread of one purpose and significance.

At the stage we are speaking of, the danger arising from the tendency to pray for mistaken objects is increased by the positive difficulty experienced in concentrating the mind upon any but material things. Indeed the difficulty of concentrating the mind at all is and remains at all times one of the chief obstacles to effective prayer. One of the objects of liturgies, ritual, and public worship in general is to assist the primitive and untrained mind in this respect. All such liturgies, while frankly recognising the necessity

of utilising concrete physical objects and images, endeavour to forestall the tendency to selfish individualism by deliberately ignoring specific private wants and emphasising first the needs of the community and nation—as representing about the limit to which the ordinary man can be expected at this stage to extend his sympathies—and, for those a little more advanced, voicing the common needs of humanity. For these and other reasons, public prayer, for the undeveloped, is infinitely more advantageous than private prayer.

The semi-intelligent and partially instructed are apt to despise such things, to regard ritual as superfluous and idolatrous, and prayers for national advantage or victory in war as necessarily immoral. The same sort of people often regard a creed as something unworthy and impossible of recognition by a man who has attained to intellectual freedom. Such men often give up their church membership and think to keep their spiritual faculties alive by listening to lectures or adopting some scheme of self-development in private. They are making a great mistake and a dangerous one, and the mere fact that they do not understand or appreciate these things is a proof that they are not yet ready for anything more advanced. For just as the mystic knows matter to be divine and the body to be the temple of the Spirit, so also does he perceive the deeper meanings wrapped up in doctrine and ritual, and in so doing understands

the reason for the inclusion of apparently vain or unworthy elements in a liturgy, and the wide possibilities of a fixed routine.

For simple men a definite liturgical frame has in fact many advantages over the apparently more flexible forms of public worship adopted in many churches. The advantage of familiarity and constant repetition can hardly be exaggerated, and well chosen words of universal, rather than private import, are in reality far more efficacious, even for the attainment of private and personal needs, than an unfamiliar and carefully particularised extempore prayer can be. The attempt to formulate successively all the various needs of a mixed congregation, and still more to do so in a different manner on each occasion, is almost hopeless, and the intellectual effort to follow the minister's train of thought is misdirected energy. All that results is a chaotic pouring forth of unrelated and half-formulated images by the congregation, and clashing and mutually destructive vibrations in the subtler unseen worlds. A liturgy is moreover a simple and natural means of fixing the wandering attention. Professor James in his *Textbook of Psychology* points out that the attention can be more easily kept from wandering when reading or listening to a discourse, if at the same time the words are mentally articulated, and he insists upon the importance of familiarity in fixing the attention. He says that "the old and familiar is

readily attended to by the mind and helps in turn to hold the new". The Churches have from time immemorial taken advantage of this fact by prescribing not merely the mental but the actual verbal repetition of prayers. This is of course especially useful for the more primitive and inexperienced Christians who compose the majority of all congregations. St. Teresa in her practical directions for prayer, even private prayer, always assumed that a beginning would be made with "vocal" as opposed to "mental" prayer, which came later on, when by practice some experience had been gained. The child at its mother's knee repeats its prayers aloud for similar reasons long after it knows them perfectly by heart. Few things are more to be regretted and more deadening in effect than the growing neglect of the congregations in so many churches to repeat aloud those parts of the service which are designed for that purpose. They probably think they are following mentally, but as a matter of fact they almost certainly are doing nothing of the kind, because most of them are not yet able to concentrate their minds sufficiently to do so.

In a well constructed liturgy each man finds his own needs expressed, but at the same time overshadowed by the need of all. Those who are incapable of formulating and defining what they really need, find a framework into which they can fit their own ill-regulated and at best but thin and meagre desires.

Their poor efforts are sustained and carried forward by the broad current, as a thin and quavering voice is sustained by a full choir; nor does the coarse and material quality of their petitions clash with that of others; rather does it reinforce as it were in a different octave, the purer notes sounded by the more spiritual worshippers. Mere hunger for bread is related to that which on a higher plane, expressed in subtler matter, is the hunger and thirst after righteousness, and the mental creation of concrete images of worldly objects is a manifestation of the same activity as that of the Word through whom all things are made. The overtones are there potentially in the lowest tone, and these weak and almost inaudible notes, present in the primitive prayers and desires of the materialist, are brought out and strengthened as if by a sounding-board. Undreamed-of correspondences with higher worlds are opened up to the ignorant man in the subtle vehicles of his own soul by the activities of his fellow-worshippers, and prayer becomes, through the efforts of all, a true sacrament, sounding out the full chord of human need and human aspiration on all planes, linking earth with Heaven, and binding all participators in a real bond, however diverse their conscious aims and aspirations may be.

If we try to express this in the scientific terms of psychology, we shall describe such prayer as a means whereby the consciousness is temporarily raised to a state which is one stage higher than its ordinary

state, and this is effected after a preliminary recapitulation of the already familiar stages. First the attention is aroused by every appeal to the eye and ear, then it is concentrated upon simple physical wants and desires, and then by suitable means the man is insensibly led on a step further, and physical wants are first mingled with and then transmuted into psychic ones. The constant repetition of such a process of prayer ultimately begins to produce a lasting effect, to expand the habitual limits of consciousness, and to bring into manifestation those higher and wider powers which had hitherto been latent. A great step has been achieved when by this or other means the centre of interest, and therefore the object of prayer, has been shifted from the things of the body to the things of the soul, even though the things of the Spirit are still in the far distant future. Yet the first faint stirrings of the Spirit are perhaps even now not so very far away: we know that though the development of the body precedes that of the soul, yet the latter begins long before the body is perfected, and even so the Spirit begins its unsuspected life while the attention is still concentrated upon the personal virtues and gifts, the sins, the joys, the miseries, which constitute the life of the soul. Truly the Kingdom of Heaven cometh not by observation; no efforts of the soul will directly bring it about—good deeds or virtues or learning are as powerless to do so as the body is to

make the soul, and therefore it is so often described as the gift of supernatural divine grace—but neither does it come by vacuity, passivity, indolence, or indifference.

The ordinary intellectual man, even while he imagines he is living chiefly in and for the physical world, is in reality, whether "religious" or not, living far more in the things of the mind and emotions, *i.e.*, the "soul," than he ever suspects. For after all, a man's capacity for purely physical experience, for pain and pleasure of the body, is strictly limited, and if he seeks a fuller and more vivid life he has perforce to do so in the sphere of soul. Real life, to all except the most futile and inane of mankind, consists of love and hate, joy and sorrow, intellect, beauty and the sense of power, rather than of good dinners, soft beds, and motor-cars. In the act of prayer a man transcends physical limitations, instead of trying to remove them, for which purpose physical action is more appropriate, and in doing so he enters into the real life of mature civilised man and comes nearer to the Divine Life of God, for the act of prayer is Life itself in microcosm. When he is fully and firmly established in this position, his own life, and the prayer appropriate to it, enter upon a new phase.

We are now in a position to consider in their due relationship some of the common and popular aspects of prayer, and to indicate some among the reasons for "success" or "failure".

Success implies putting oneself in harmony with the reservoir of natural energy, which may equally well be termed the power and life of God, or, more exactly, with that manifestation and mode of energy which is concerned with the particular plane to which the prayer belongs. The effect is not the product of one's own private store of energy, but of the Power of God, of the whole store of energy and life in the Universe, which is latent until it is given the needful channel for manifestation, just as physicists tell us electricity is latent in the physical world. Prayer on the physical plane, *i.e.*, work, is not the abrogation but the skilful application of natural law. The man who uses steam power does not create that power, but, taking advantage of the laws of gravity and of thermodynamics, draws upon the limitless stores of solar energy a draft which is invariably honoured to the uttermost farthing. Whether it is successful or not depends upon the due relation of means to end and upon the exactness with which the various "laws" are brought into harmonious activity.

What is more difficult at first to understand is the reason for success or failure in those transitional prayers which include both physical and superphysical objects and activities, and where it is in fact sought to convert mental energy into the physical energy necessary to produce physical results. The most easily and certainly successful prayers of this

kind are those connected with the condition of our own physical body, because we already possess a highly organised and elaborate nervous machinery for the transformation and direct application of energy in this field. Obviously there are limits even here, for no amount of prayer will replace an amputated leg, and it would be foolish to attempt it. In that particular field no suitable machinery exists or can be extemporised for the transformation of mental energy into physical. What then happens if a man does attempt it ? Is the energy lost, the prayer in vain ? Not so : nothing is ever lost or can be lost in this Universe. Balked in one outlet, it will assuredly find other manifestation. Much will be wasted and dissipated in relatively useless "friction" on the mental plane, just as ill-applied muscular energy is dissipated in heat and friction on the physical plane. But even so, because the mind or soul is not a mere mechanism but a living, organic vehicle, that effort of will, that concentration of thought involved in the prayer have their effect in building up as it were the muscles of the soul and increasing its capacity. The Laws of physiology indicate to us the means whereby the bodily vehicle grows in strength through exercise, that is to say draws upon the energy of the entire physical universe. Similarly the soul, by conforming to the laws of psychology in prayer, puts itself into a position where it cannot but draw upon the whole power and life of God as manifested in the

psychic plane, which then flows in upon it and builds it up.

Of course such activities and prayers may be useful or injurious quite irrespective of their "success," just as physical activities may be. There are forms of physical activity and training which may fully achieve their object and yet be injurious to the body. There are others which, without really injuring the body, may tend to interfere with mental development. So there are prayers for victory and success which, embodying priciples of hatred, may actually injure the soul, and there are others of a self-regarding nature which are not positively injurious and indeed may be calculated to build up and strengthen the powers and faculties of the soul, but nevertheless may tend to make it less useful as a vehicle of spiritual energy. Thus there are prayers which may be only too " successful " and prove serious obstacles in the future.

In all such prayers, good or bad, effective or ineffective, the results follow according to law, each in its own plane, and that finishes the matter. But when there is any element of unselfishness or devotion or love present, whether directed towards God or man or animal, then additional effects follow of a different kind. The law of Love (to be distinguished from mere emotion or desire) is to the Spirit what the laws of psychology are to the mind, or those of physics and physiology to the body. In so far as any prayer

is in conformity with this law, it puts a man into relationship with the spiritual world and enables him to utilise its energy. And as a prayer with an impossible or absurd physical object may still be very fully answered on the plane of the mind or soul, so may it also be rich and fruitful in its effect upon the dawning spiritual capacities. Furthermore, if such a prayer be of an intercessory character, while circumstances may prevent any direct physical or mental energy reaching or assisting another, yet direct action upon the spiritual plane always results in proportion to the spiritual element in the prayer, and this is true whether the prayer is for the dead or the living. We may conceive of the direct transference of physical energy as accompanied by the maximum of inefficiency and friction, that of mental energy as more efficient, and that of spiritual energy as being immediate and complete without any waste whatever. A little spiritual energy goes a long way; love is absolutely efficient. Such power is independent of all mistakes or imperfect knowledge. It manifests as inspiration and enables the recipient to help himself through his own mind and body, and is therefore the best of all forms of assistance.

Again, if a prayer governed by illogical or self-contradictory ideas, or addressed to a ridiculous, crude or false conception of God, is inspired by real love and devotion, there will, it is true, be waste, though not loss, of mental energy, but the conformity

with the spiritual law of Love will none the less put the man into touch with the illimitable spiritual power of God and produce its inevitable results. In fact it matters less who or what we pray to, than that we pray in the right way, for there is no God but God, and every prayer reaches Him and is answered by Him.

The supreme efficacy, in the ordinary affairs of body and soul, of the prayer which is truly spiritual has often been noticed. He who prays may be weak in body, illiterate and ignorant, and yet marvellous things are sometimes effected. Why is it that "the prayer of a righteous man availeth much"? The reason for the triumph of the spiritual over imperfections of the mind or soul is analogous to that for the commonly observed superiority of skill over muscle. Spiritual power is skill in action in a higher sense. A small amount of spiritual force applied to the mind or body enormously increases the efficiency of both, even though these may be in themselves extremely imperfect; but so long as this imperfection remains, the flooding of the vehicles with spiritual force is not unattended by danger. The electrical conductor of small capacity or great internal resistance is often smashed to pieces by the discharge of a current of high potential, and the higher the potential the greater the risk. Similarly the premature application of spiritual energy through an imperfect soul or mind or body may lead to disastrous results, to

unbalanced, foolish or even vicious actions, to fanaticism and self-delusion.

The real triumph of man will only arrive when spiritual power is brought to bear upon a body and soul which have already been brought into a high degree of perfection, that is to say into harmony with the actual realities of the physical and mental worlds and the Divine Life which plays in and through them. If the spiritual part of man then awakens, he will not only through these faculties be able to draw comparatively unlimited drafts upon the Divine Life at its highest potential, but, because his own lower vehicles of mind and body are now harmonious and efficient, they will be able to carry without injury and disruption a higher charge of energy and power, and the whole being will be flooded with the Divine Life and irradiated with the Divine Light.

At the stage of which we are now speaking, where such prayers as already mentioned are likely to be prayed, this triumph is as yet far distant. Much has to be done with the mental and psychic vehicle of consciousness before it can tolerate without danger to its equilibrium and risk of disorganisation such an inflow of power. It has to be brought, either by life itself or by the deliberate and rational use of prayer, or best of all by both, into some degree first of all of stability, strength, and general capacity, and then of purity and harmony and high temper on its own plane, before it is ready for its transfiguration.

For this purpose a different kind of prayer will be required.

The Building of the Soul

When a man has reached the stage wherein his interests are definitely centred upon the inner or soul-life, it is naturally the limitations of that life which he feels most acutely, and prayer for him naturally takes on another aspect. For one thing he finds that these limitations are chiefly in himself, rather than imposed on him from without, and the response to effort is more immediate and certain. He is chiefly concerned at first with questions of the emotions, with morality and ethics, with virtues and vices, and of course with the joys and sorrows which these things afford. The starving or stunting of intellect and emotion is as real a pain to him as hunger was to the lion, or as poverty to the pure materialist, and the tendency to indulge in vice and neglect virtue are, after a time, found to be the principal evils or limitations from which he desires to escape. Sin comes to be as disgusting as dirt or bodily disease, and it is, as a fact, as much a product of ignorance and stupidity as are the dirt-bred diseases of the body. Questions of conscience now cause as much distress as business worries used to do, and clear insight is desired as a blind man might desire sight for his eyes.

He betakes himself therefore to prayer to relieve himself of these limitations, and again the actual methods are twofold. At first he fights these limitations upon their own plane, that is, the plane of the soul and the intellect—the plane of morality—and the effective prayer for this purpose, in the very act of which he makes his escape, is suitably directed mental and emotional activity, as formerly it was physical activity or "work". Of course the usual transition and transformation of motive takes place. At first it is the physical and then the mental *consequences* of wrong and ignorance which are feared, but this is gradually transformed into the love of good and hatred of evil for their own sakes, because all the "good" thoughts and emotions actually consist in an expansion of consciousness while they are being experienced, while the "evil" ones are felt as limitation. For "good" is life, union with God, the All-Conscious, and evil is in its nature that which at any particular stage tends towards limitation of the consciousness appropriate thereto. A man at this stage prays because he likes to "feel good," though, if he is ignorant of the science of prayer, his methods are sometimes ill-suited to that purpose.

The key to success is the knowledge that, as far as the soul is concerned, a man *becomes* what he *thinks*, and in a certain sense that for the moment he actually is what he thinks, as far as mental or soul-life is

concerned. Now it is plainly impossible to pray for a virtue of which you cannot form any conception whatever, and still less for one which you do not really feel to be desirable; while if you make a mistake about what is "good" for you at the moment, and are incautious enough to pray for it, your prayer in the nature of things will be answered, but the results may be exceedingly disappointing. There are then three principal elements concerned in this prayer; first, discrimination between things that only appear to be and things that are really desirable because, *if you are able to pray for them at all*, they bring with them real freedom and expansion of consciousness; secondly, the power of forming a clear conception of the desirable object (in this case, of course, a state of mind); and thirdly, the power of will and concentration which make it possible to hold firmly and continuously to this conception when formed. These are as essential as acute senses, developed muscles and animal vitality are for successful action (*i.e.*, prayer) on the physical plane. The rudiments of them already exist, having grown up unperceived as the result of the physical activities belonging to the previous stage, but the result and purpose of prayer at this stage is to develop them fully, though the *apparent* purpose be the satisfaction of the emotions, for at this stage also our true aim is other than we think—"It doth not yet appear what we shall be".

We may note that here too, the specific act of prayer and the general attitude towards life must not be too widely inconsistent with one another. If we habitually harbour evil thoughts, the effect of prayer for virtue may be completely annulled; while a prayer that attempts to soar into the bright thin air of the Spirit will faint for lack of sustenance and because the world of Spirit is as yet "unreal" and divorced from life. Another practical consideration that now appears, is that to dwell in the act of prayer upon one's own sins and imperfections is merely to strengthen them, not to get rid of them. "Forgiveness" is not needed, for the turning away from sin and the setting of the face toward goodness *is* forgiveness, though the results of past errors are of course only in so far destroyed as we may subsequently achieve by setting in motion the opposing forces of goodness. We should, it is true, try to discriminate clearly between what has been right and what wrong in our conduct; but having done what is in our power to remedy it, the thoughts should be turned henceforth steadily upon all that is true, pure and beautiful. There is nothing more likely to make a man into a miserable sinner than that he should be always thinking of himself as such. Lest this be thought to militate against humility, it should be pointed out that *at this stage* humility is not the thing to be aimed at, but rather the building up of a strong centre of individual consciousness. Self-respect is here the

key-note; humility comes later, and is absolutely essential to the growth of the spiritual faculties; but, if sought too soon, the result is merely flabbiness and weakness, which makes all progress towards spirituality impossible, even if it does not end in hypocrisy.

For the man who is in this stage, public and liturgical prayer is usually of less importance than private prayer, for he may be presumed by this time to be able to formulate his own needs more or less clearly, and to be able to some extent to concentrate his attention. But his private prayer may become much more effective if he knows something of practical psychology and understands how his own faculties work.

When a man prays to God for strength or for the attainment of some virtue, or for guidance or enlightenment, what does he do, and what is the answer? What he does is, in effect, to picture to himself as vividly as possible the virtue or the strength that he desires. He thinks either of that virtue as an abstract quality possessed by God in a transcendent degree of perfection, or, more probably, he thinks of the concrete exemplification of it in the person of his Saviour and Master: he thinks of himself as being in touch with the Almighty Power, and able to draw upon an inexhaustible reservoir. But when he pictures all this *to* himself he is, in reality, picturing it literally *in* himself, for, as we say, he pictures it in his mind, and his mind is at this stage

for practical purposes "himself". Now in the mental or soul-world the making of such a picture or conception is equivalent to the providing of a channel through which the universal spiritual energy may manifest, a machinery for the transformation of spiritual into soul-energy. A man's own efforts to mould himself into a particular form do, in the very act, induce an inflow of power from "without" which reinforces the power exercised from "within" the soul, exactly in proportion as the effort and the mental image created are in harmony with the realities of the soul-world. Thus while a man, by following and praying for false ideals, may with much labour and effort mould himself into their likeness, such success would in any case be only temporary; while an effort to bring himself into harmony with reality, as it exists in the soul-world, is both immeasurably more fruitful and effective and also more permanent. The process, when constantly repeated, results in the attitude of mind becoming habitual, and thus ultimately the virtue or the strength is acquired and the consciousness permanently expanded. Prayer brings its own answer—is indeed its own answer—direct from God, not "supernaturally" but in conformity with those expressions of the Will of God which we call the laws of psychology. True indeed is it that: "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear."

It will be seen that prayer at this stage is hardly to be distinguished from meditation, for to meditate upon a virtue is to pray for it, with this further advantage that, being a less personal and exclusive form of activity, it has less tendency to make a man priggish and sanctimonious. Many books of practical directions for meditation have been written, and different temperaments require different methods; but all really useful and practical methods are based upon a knowledge, empirical or otherwise, of the laws of psychology, and are calculated not only to attain the immediate end in view, which in this case is the expansion of consciousness upon the mental and moral levels, but also to pave the way, perhaps unconsciously, for a further advance into the spiritual regions, where the limitations of the soul are transcended rather than removed. Such methods will, moreover, embody in themselves a recapitulation of the more primitive stages, thus following the course of nature, and leading the consciousness onward by easy and natural steps towards an expansion beyond the normal, for without much practice the mind cannot suddenly withdraw from outer things towards which its attention has through past ages been directed, and direct itself upon the inner world—and that very inability is just one of the limitations which have to be conquered.

All methods of meditation involve in some form or other the following stages. First the body is quieted

and the attention withdrawn from the outer world. This is sometimes done by reading, or by fixing the eyes upon a crucifix or a picture, or by music or other such means. But the mind must not be made vacant, for it is not self-hypnotisation that is desired, but alertness and vigorous work in the unseen world, and meditation differs profoundly from self-hypnotisation. Therefore the means which are used for fixing the attention should have a familiar and habitual relation to the interior world of thought. Thus through the eyes or the ears the mind is led into itself, and there, dwells upon what it desires; and the physical senses, having been first concentrated, are then stilled and transcended. Then in turn the mind, having found an *interior* object, *i.e.*, a thought, which gives it pleasure, proceeds to dwell upon it, either by imagining it as embodied in the Saviour, or by thinking out its meaning and its application to all the circumstances of life. By thinking of the Saviour the man becomes like Him, and by meditating upon purity or honesty or any other virtue he weaves them into his character.

This is at first the direct and deliberate object of his prayer—to improve his own moral character, and these efforts are in effect directed towards removing rather than transcending the limitations of the soul. So long as the main interest in life is that of the personal self and its relations, these direct efforts constitute the right and appropriate form of prayer.

As, however, success is in part attained and the man acquires what the Greeks called the "political" virtues, *i.e.*, becomes an ordinarily good man, higher possibilities present themselves and the value of previous achievements seems less decisive. He becomes less concerned with the "saving" of his own paltry soul; the desire for personal virtue or for personal enlightenment becomes merged into the love of all goodness and beauty, and delight in the laws of Nature or of God for their own sake; he begins to reach out from himself to God, not asking benefits but pouring himself out in devotion and aspiration. The emphasis is upon union and universality, and not upon separateness of personality, and the terms "within" and "without" take on a less rigid meaning.

Here we are dealing with the transition from the typical prayer of the Soul, or Mind, to the prayer of the Spirit, a stage which is sometimes called "Contemplation," sometimes also, especially by St. Teresa, the "Prayer of Quiet". For the very reason that it is transitional it is impossible to specify it very exactly. It begins in meditation and "recollectedness" and is perfected into a sense of peace, as concentration is attained and the wanderings of the mind are stilled. It would appear that, since the consciousness is by no means empty, the mind in some form is made use of, but certainly not the concrete, image-making side of it: it is what St. Teresa calls

"the superior part of the Soul"—not yet the "Spirit"—which is concerned, and its activity is largely dependent upon the progress that has been made in the control of the lower mental faculties. All distracting thoughts, such as those of sin and imperfection, must especially be avoided, and in fact no thought of self should exist at all. This implies that, as the result of long practice, there should now be no conscious mental effort, for there is a practical certainty that it would be in reality selfish, however subtly so. An effort even to think on nothing stultifies the soul and makes the imagination more restless. Hence it is certain that this prayer of contemplation cannot be forced, but will in good time come naturally, if meditation and concentration are assiduously practised. Once more it must be repeated that such practice is useless without a corresponding attitude being carried into the ordinary affairs of life. Thoughtfulness and concentration in these things must go hand in hand with the practice of meditation.

There is also a stage which corresponds with and is essential to the practice of "contemplation," for this can hardly be attained by a man who has not developed to some extent the power of genuine intuition (by no means to be confused with mere "fancy"), by means of which he can carry on his activities without entire dependence upon the logical faculties of the discursive intellect. "Contemplation," indeed, is to ordinary prayer and meditation very much what

"intuition" is to intellect, for it is the faculty of going straight to the heart of things. Again, just as this prayer requires the discarding of the ordinary mental activities, so, in the wider sphere of life, the corresponding stage implies a power of detachment, a "sitting loosely" to the interest of the personal self, an acting upon principle, not upon inclination (which belongs to a much lower stage), and not even upon policy (which corresponds with the mental state of meditation and concentration).

The immediate effect of this prayer is an extraordinary sense of lightness and freedom. Fear and scrupulousness disappear, and there is a feeling of enlargement, serenity and sanity. These are precisely the effects which are produced in everyday life by the habitual use of the intuition, by acting always on principle without care for the consequences, and by detachment.

The Prayer of the Spirit

And so, by degrees, man reaches the stage where the true Prayer of the Spirit becomes a possibility, and finally a necessity to him. Of this prayer it is difficult, nay almost impossible to speak. Of all that lies within or below the stage of the intellect—of the physical objects, the desires, the emotions, the thoughts, the aspirations, the vices or the virtues, which have hitherto formed the subject and the method

of prayer—it is not impossible, however difficult it may be, to convey an impression in language. It is only the ignorance or the inadequate equipment of the speaker which stands in the way. For these belong to a category which forms or may form the material for a mental concept. But with the things of the Spirit it is otherwise. It is no mere difficulty of finding language, or even of forming a concept, that intervenes: it is rather that in so far as it becomes the matter of a mental concept, Spirit—the essentially free, the unlimited, the Life—ceases in a sense to *be* Spirit, and becomes form, the plaything of the mind. It is the old story of chasing the rainbow—the glorious light has become a drop of rain. For truly "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," nor can ever, in the nature of things, see or hear or understand.

Can then man know God at all? Can we do more than know *about* God? The difference is that between the spiritual man and the merely good man. It is the knowledge of God which is Eternal Life, not the knowledge about God. He can never be known by the intellect, and still less by the emotions; He is known only by becoming united with Him, and this is the supreme escape from limitation which is the essence of prayer. He is not known by creeds and preachings and prayers of the ordinary kind. So long as we pray to God, so long as we love Him and worship Him as a Being outside ourselves and other than ourselves, we cannot reach Him, we cannot know

Him. For that very prayer, or love, or worship, is itself the sign that we are approaching Him, but that we are not united with Him. When our will is blended with the Divine will, when our consciousness sees and knows as He sees and knows, then we know Him. In all that has gone before, in all the mental concepts which stand at the root of our prayers, we have been attempting the conversion of the Godhead into flesh : the spiritual life is the taking of our manhood into God. God can only be known by God, and it is the Divine Self in man which " knows " God.

It is idle, therefore, to attempt a description of that which must be experienced to be understood. And yet it may be of service to attempt so much as will suffice at any rate to show that, whatever spirituality *is*, it is quite definitely *not* merely an extreme degree of virtue, or of love, or of any kind of emotion or aspiration, as is so often supposed, any more than it is an extreme degree of intellectual or physical development. The prayer of the Spirit is accordingly something different in kind from the prayer of the soul for virtue, and the difference is far greater than that which exists between the good man's prayer for virtue or help or enlightenment and the " prayer " of the animal for food or sex-gratification or of the undeveloped man for victory or worldly success. Those other prayers have been the efforts of the self to escape from conditions, inward or outward, which are felt as limitations—

in order to become a bigger or more powerful or greater or nobler self. But this prayer of the Spirit is the effort of the self, now a stable, highly developed and powerful, but none the less limited entity, to escape from itself altogether, that it may live henceforth consciously in the Eternal Now and the Eternal Here, which is Life everywhere and for ever.

Such a prayer, therefore, is no longer a petition; it is no longer a seeking of anything, however exalted, for the self, or for any other individual self, for that would be stultification—a mere contradiction in terms. Truly to pray that prayer is no longer even to seek, but to find. It is the fulfilment of the declaration that he who would save his life must lose it—a paradox indeed, for the experience of the Spirit always presents itself as paradox when clothed in intellectual form. It is the last and supreme operation of the psychological entity, by which, ceasing to be itself, it becomes a spiritual being. Saint Teresa has described the process, but even she cannot describe the result of the process. She can only say that it is a transformation such as that of the chrysalis into the butterfly, and that the condition of the new life is that "the worm must die". This is a matter of experience—direct, immediate and unquestionable—however antagonistic it may appear to our preconceived ideas about the nature and direction of human evolution.

Prayer of the ordinary kind can lead one up to the threshold, but can never take one across it. On the other hand the final step forward into the new life cannot be taken until the threshold has been approached; thus none of the previous stages can be omitted. And, once more, as in the lower stages, an habitual attitude of mind and outlook upon life is inexorably demanded, if the special psychological operation which we call "prayer" is to succeed in its object. This attitude can best be described as the Principle of Unity, realised by the intellect and carried out in the life. It shows itself in the habitual concern with all that is shared in common rather than with what divides man from man, and in the joyful recognition of universal brotherhood as exemplified in St. Francis, and the willing indentification of oneself with the vicious and criminal brother. Thence follows the eye that sees beauty and goodness everywhere, until there gradually emerges the consciousness of God in every creature, and the whole world and all the processes of the world-life become unspeakably solemn and glad and sublime, and sadness and regrets become impossible. For, in the words of Julian of Norwich, "God doeth all-thing, and all-thing that is done it is well done . . . for verily sin is no deed".

While the character has ripened as the result of long experience and continuous endeavour, whether or not "prayer" has been deliberately used for this

purpose, the unfoldment of the Spirit, the opening of this Principle of Unity has been going on all the time beneath the surface, until it is ready and able to emerge into conscious life. In looking at the primitive transition from the life of the body to the life of the emotions and the intellect, we saw that a time comes when man finds that his capacity for purely physical experience is limited, and that if he seeks a fuller life he must do so in the sphere of soul. So it is, again, when he is nearing the great transformation.

There comes a time when the activities of the soul and the mind, that which has hitherto been for all practical purposes the "self," with its emotions, its personal loves and personal hatreds, its struggles, its falls and its victories, begin to pall, as did formerly the bodily pleasures. At first the real reason is not discerned, and the new wine is poured into the old bottle. Just as in the previous transition period from bodily to mental interests the dawning powers of the mind at first merely enhance the physical life, so now the dawning, but as yet unrecognised spiritual faculty intensifies the soul-life, and the added power is used, sometimes with frantic energy, for the purpose of obtaining more and more soul-satisfaction by the expansion of consciousness along the old, familiar lines. For a time the man is bound to believe that the new and increasing sense of limitation and futility is due to deficiency in the mind and the soul, as previously to lack of bodily satisfaction,

and he throws himself with redoubled effort into the expansion of the soul-life. He thinks the remedy is *more* knowledge, *more* virtue, *more* activity, and he does not yet realise the possibility of escaping from the soul itself into the life of the Spirit, because soul-consciousness is all he has ever known. He endeavours to escape by combatting the insistent and growing sense of limitation on the soul-plane itself, and this, we have seen, is " prayer " or " work " upon that plane.

Now, so long as the man's interests are really centred upon the soul-plane, this is undoubtedly the right kind of prayer, just as physical activity is the right kind for the animal, and indeed for the animal man. We have seen that it is useless, and in fact impossible, to pray for that which we do not really want, but merely think we ought to want, and still more so to pray for that which our faculties are not yet capable of apprehending at all. Yet the effect of praying always and only for the very highest that those faculties are capable of apprehending, is undoubtedly to develop them in such a manner as to pave the way for the transition to a higher plane altogether. Thus these very activities of the soul—the struggle for more virtue and more knowledge—the immediate result of which is now losing its attractiveness, have had, as always, an effect quite other than that which was their ostensible aim. That effect has been to prepare the soul-faculties to

become the instrument and the means of manifestation of something utterly different in kind from themselves. Beneath the weariness, the feeling of inadequacy and of approaching change, the boundless vitality of the new spiritual life begins fitfully to show itself.

But before the new possibilities are definitely recognised and followed, this period of frantic soul-effort is almost certain to come. Some men tire of it sooner, some later; some, with developed powers of mind, seek and find refuge—for a little time longer—in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake; some by ceaseless action try to retain the savour of the old interest and the old excitement; others vainly endeavour to prolong, by excessive piety, the pleasure of being virtuous and devotional. Most of us live and die without having exhausted these possibilities, or rather without having perceived or at least practically realised their ultimate insufficiency. It is possible to go on and on, accumulating perfections and faculties and emotions and virtues and knowledge till a man becomes a veritable paragon; and yet these things do not by their accumulation produce satisfaction, nor do they represent what is best in humanity, any more than the muscles of the athlete produce intelligence or satisfy the needs of the intellect.

To the supreme souls, the real flower of humanity, there comes sooner or later a supreme weariness.

Solomon discovered that "of the making of many books there is no end," and the excess of emotion and the consciousness of virtue bring no more permanent satisfaction than the accumulation of knowledge. "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the sun," said the Preacher, and he spoke of more than the bodily life of the individual between the cradle and the grave. As the time draws near for "the worm" to die, it becomes sick. Desire fails —even desire for virtue and knowledge; love ceases to thrill, emotion stirs no more. Vice at its best was long ago found to be a poor thing, but now virtue and morality, once so eagerly sought for, so earnestly prayed for, so steadfastly practised, turn to dust and ashes, and for a season "the mourners go about the streets". Man is approaching his long home by the gate of death, not of the body, but of that thing which he had thought to be his very self—his mind, his soul. An inner, a deeper "self" is struggling to be born, while the soul, the old "self," now in its turn become merely the outer husk, the protecting matrix of the new life, sinks into a grey calm, which to itself seems the calm of approaching dissolution.

The true path of progress, then, when this stage is reached, is the turning away not merely from more material to less material objects of desire, as in previous stages of transition, but the turning away from "self" altogether. To that which has hitherto regarded itself as "self," namely, the concrete

intellect, such an attitude inevitably appears to be the deliberate renunciation of all that has hitherto constituted life and consciousness for the sake of something indefinable and therefore unreal, an adventure into that "supernatural" which the intellect rightly posits as the unthinkable and therefore as equivalent to the non-existent. And yet it would be a fatal mistake to suppose that there is anything arbitrary or miraculous about it, or conflicting with the conception of an ordered universe. It is not the abrogation of law but the superimposing of a higher law upon a lower, analogous to the apparent supersession of the "law" of gravity by the interposition of the human intellect, which is nevertheless itself subject to the "laws" of psychology. An even more serious mistake, yet one frequently made, is to suppose that this transformation is nothing but a lapse from intellect into emotion and the realm of fancy, for it is in reality the acquisition of a new faculty which is neither intellect nor imagination nor emotion, but a higher and more immediate reality than any of these.

It is in effecting this transformation that the vital need of humility is experienced—that humility which has been rightly described as the very basis of the spiritual life. For the supreme virtue of "humility," and this turning away from the "self" altogether, connote the same thing. So long as the immediate task is the acquisition of virtue and character, and

the training in that degree of love which is a function of the individual self, humility, as already remarked, is out of place, or even a hindrance. Here it becomes a necessity.

The task now to be attempted is a far more difficult one than the renunciation of bodily pleasures for those of the mind or soul, or of vice for virtue. It is only rendered tolerable, or even possible, by the growth within of a faculty other than the intellect in which the consciousness may be centred anew. Any premature attempt, before the psychological " self " has grown into a strong centre, does in fact result in a kind of paralysis or even disintegration of consciousness, showing itself as mere vacuity and *un*consciousness, or at best in psychic visions and images, instead of in *super*consciousness. The new birth has obviously nothing to do with the development of the so-called " psychic " faculties, for in so far as these concern themselves with images or " visions," they are clearly within and not beyond the purview and scope of intellectual consciousness—the image-making faculty—whereas the spiritual consciousness is something which, while it may find partial expression through intellectual concepts or psychic visions and sensations, or physical actions, is not limited to any or all of these, and does not consist of them.

St. Teresa, Julian of Norwich, and in fact almost every one who is competent to speak, testify to the

fact that such visions are frequent at this stage, that they are neither to be feared, as a rule at any rate, nor unduly valued. At the worst they are a hindrance; at the best they are only a vehicle through which the spiritual consciousness, when really acquired or in course of being acquired, may express itself to the intellect. They are a danger only when sought or valued for their own sake; while from another point of view they may be regarded as highly interesting glimpses of the more intimate mechanism of nature, useful to those who know how to use them, dangerous to those who do not, but, compared with the Life that is sought, mechanism none the less. In cases where mystics have described and attempted to classify these visions, it is to be noted that the lowest, called "imaginary," *i.e.*, not fanciful or unreal but conveyed by pictures or sounds, are distinguished from the "intellectual," and these from the "spiritual"; and while the two former classes can be more or less described, and therefore come within the scope of the intellect, the latter are indescribable and probably belong to the content of the spiritual consciousness itself. The reason why they may become hindrances is that they are essentially an enhancement of the personal "self," which makes that "self" harder to transcend. When the great change has been effected, all the faculties involved in the use of these psychic senses may be used with impunity, and frequently are so used as servants of the spiritual consciousness.

Enough has been said to show that the particular expansion of consciousness which we call the New Birth, and which is the object and at the same time the substance of the highest kind of prayer, is something *sui generis*, and that it is led up to as the climax of a very definite psychological development; and further that, just as the absolute perfection of physical development is not a prerequisite for the centering of life in the "soul" or mind, so the birth of the spiritual man does not involve the previous attainment of perfection in virtue or intellect, though in both instances a considerable degree of attainment *is* needed.

We found that in all the previous stages there is an appropriate "prayer," or definite psychological operation, by the use of which a man can temporarily raise himself a single step beyond what is normal to that stage, and that through constant practice in its use the higher stage tends to become habitual; and so it is here. St. Teresa, the most systematic among the practical mystics, gives the name "Prayer of Union" to this operation, because its most obvious achievement is the removal of the limitations which hitherto have constituted the selfhood of the self, allowing it to be flooded by and to expand into the Divine Self, or in other words, bringing about the union of the human consciousness with the Divine. Even in contemplation, as indeed the name implies, we are still outside, not inside. But in that union

man ceases for the time to be subject to the limitations of man; though he does not cease to be man, he becomes more than man.

Like other prayers, its method is a recapitulation in miniature of the whole previous evolution of consciousness (and therefore of the previous stages of "prayer" already described), ending in the launching forth upon a new phase. As St. Teresa says, very many can reach this point, but very few can take the next momentous step and pass beyond. The preliminary stages of this prayer are naturally those that have been already described, but by this time they will have become easy and almost instinctive, so that the stage of concentration, called by some "Contemplation," and by St. Teresa the "Prayer of Quiet," will be quickly reached. It will now be understood that while in the previous stages meditation upon a virtue, or upon the person of a Saviour or Master, had as its object the personal attainment of that virtue and the approximation on the mental and moral plane to the character assigned to or imagined of that Ideal, the importance of it in relation to the next step is chiefly the attainment of the power of concentration itself, the power, that is, of controlling the movements of the mind more and more until it becomes utterly still. The true function of activity in the past, whether mental or physical, is similarly found to be in this relationship, the development of the will-power; while love, the essence of all the

virtues which have been acquired, now presents itself as true wisdom or *un*selfishness—that true wisdom which finds no barrier between the individual self and the Universal Divine Self, which breaks down the distinction between the within and the without, that by which the self un-selfs itself, which alone makes possible the complete escape which constitutes the next step.

The nature of ordinary intellectual cognition implies the duality of the knower and the known, of the self of man and the Self of God. When, therefore, we enquire into the psychological operation which leads up to this final knowledge, we see that so long as the mind is actively engaged with mental concepts, or the affections with personal love, even of the very loftiest character, the duality of knower and known is thereby maintained. The problem is therefore to cease to think and to imagine, and to observe without becoming *un*conscious—which is what necessarily results from ceasing to think before the spiritual faculty is developed and ready for the birth. The state aimed at is not one of reverie, of mere inactivity or passivity, but one of the supremest activity; only that activity is not concerned with material things or feelings or mental concepts at all. It is such a state which is described by St. Teresa as the "Prayer of Union". It represents an expansion of consciousness which as much transcends the capacity of the mind as the latter does that of the body, and is so tremendous that the naïve and

unlearned naturally describe it as the veritable "supernatural" indwelling of God Himself in His fullness, though doubtless in reality it is not so. St. Teresa says that the soul is in the body, "yet she seems to be separated from it"; and, again, that "here there is no imagination nor memory nor understanding that can hinder this good". Yet there would still appear to be a consciousness in some sense of duality. It is "Union" as distinguished from "Unity": there is distinction but no separateness. She uses the beautiful simile: "Union is like two tapers so joined together that the light of both makes but one; or that the wick, light and wax are all one and the same," but says that they may still be separated again, thus indicating that even this "Prayer of Union" is only a transition stage to something which is definite and permanent.

Although this spiritual life entirely transcends the mental, it would be a great mistake to suppose that it involves the permanent negation of the mental powers. It is true that these latter are not involved in the temporary attainment thereof. The schoolboy does not play cricket in the hours devoted to the training of the mind, but nevertheless the scope of the physical powers is vastly and permanently increased as the result of mental development, while at the same time they cease to be applied solely to the playground but are made subservient to the rational life of the mind and soul. Similarly the

spiritual life, when attained, far from leading to or requiring mental and bodily inertia, on the contrary enhances and vivifies the mental and bodily faculties to an extraordinary degree, but so as to make them subserve the purposes of the Spirit. The records of those who have truly attained are frequently records of tremendous activity and efficiency in the affairs of the world, and yet these outer activities are undoubtedly only a partial expression and indication of far greater and more effective work carried on in the invisible worlds. We must remember, in fact, that we only know *about* their true life, for to *know* that life is to share it.

That the expansion of consciousness can take place otherwise than through someone who has himself fully and completely attained to this Union with God, is contrary to the testimony of those who have experienced it, though from the scientific point of view the reason for this is not clear. Those who have attained, to whatever religion they have belonged, whatever their intellectual belief, have, where they have given any information upon this point at all, left on record their indebtedness to a Saviour, a Master—someone in whom the Divinity was made manifest, in most cases someone who was acknowledged as man and yet at the same time worshipped as God. The idea of a merely vicarious saviour belongs not to this stage of prayer at all, but to the earlier one of soul-prayer. At this stage the Saviour, combining in his own person the human and Divine consciousness

—that combination which is the object and substance of the " Prayer of Union " itself—becomes to the disciple rather the Way and method of the At-one-ment; a Mediator, it is true, but in the sense of a bridge, a connecting link, someone through whom the disciple, by uniting his personal self with the Master's self, may unite himself with the Universal Self of God. The process, being specifically the transformation of soul-consciousness into spiritual consciousness, is not describable in terms of psychology, but for that very reason we may be well assured that, being of universal import, and experienced by people of such widely different conceptions and beliefs, it cannot be confined exclusively to or described fully by the current terms of any one system of theology. The use of any language whatever in this connection can never be didactic or scientific. Its value is the value of poetry and art, which, foregoing all attempt at " explanation," endeavours by symbolism and imagery to arouse in another the power, if but for a moment, of finding out by experience what is utterly incommunicable in its reality.

Tremendous as is the scope of this "Prayer of Union" and the Spiritual Life which corresponds to it—the life which has escaped from the chrysalis of the intellect—there is good reason to believe that it is not the final goal of humanity. There is still, as St. Teresa declares, a touch of duality about it; and she proclaims, as a matter of experience not to be gainsaid

by any consideration of the logical or theological consequences which follow therefrom, an experience which belongs equally to the so-called "*Via negativa*" of Plotinus and of Oriental mystics, and is shared, in fact, by the great ones of all times and all religions—an even more stupendous possibility which she describes under the figure of "the consummation of the Spiritual Nuptials".

This condition, through whatever religion or philosophy it is attained, presupposes that of "Union" already described, for indeed "No man cometh to the Father but by the Way"; and it matters not under what form of theological belief or philosophical conception that Way may be described. Once more, "There is no God but God"; and there is no Way but that which is also declared to be the Truth and the Life. "Religions" belong to the mental life, the soul life, not the spiritual life. Names do not alter facts; and man's beliefs, belonging as they do to the plane of the intellect, are powerless to alter or to affect the fundamental facts which concern the unfolding of his spiritual life. Before the "Principle of Unity" these differences inevitably disappear, and the higher the state attained the more complete is the disappearance. From our lower intellectual standpoint, the standpoint of the people who write books on Mysticism, it may be right and proper to draw distinctions; but "in Christ" there is neither Jew nor Gentile, nor Christian nor heathen, nor philosophy nor logic nor theology;

and when that supreme state is reached in which, as St. Paul says, "God is all in all," what room is there for difference? Here, at the end and fulfilment of all prayer says St. Teresa, "the butterfly dies". She declares that "more cannot be said (as far as can be understood) than that the Spirit of this soul is made one thing with God," and again, that it is like rain water mixing with river water so that they can never again be distinguished. The Buddhist finds no better terms to describe what he means by Nirvāṇa than this same beautiful picture: "The dewdrop slips into the shining sea," and another great modern mystic has said: "Thou art thyself the Object of thy search: thou art thy Master and thy God."

But these things are mysteries, which are outside the scope of prayer considered as a science. We can only say that those who have, in all religions, left us the record of this culminating experience, have at the same time given proof in their own persons that the transcending of all duality does not result in any diminution of Life in its more concrete manifestations, as might be theoretically expected, but rather in Life fuller and more abundant than the man of the world ever dreams of. Here, then, the subject must perforce be left, at the point where the intellect, having done its essential part, of necessity and yet with all confidence and joy, willingly and deliberately transcends itself, and this Mortal puts on Immortality.

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